



PODARGUS HUMERALIS: Vig & Horsf.

PODARGUS HUMERALIS, *Vig. and Horsf.*

Tawny-shouldered Podargus.

Caprimulgus gracilis? Lath. Ind. Orn. Supp., p. 58.

Gracile Goatsucker? Ib. Gen. Syn. Supp., vol. ii. p. 263.—Steph. Cont. of Shaw's Zool., vol. x. p. 145.—Lath. Gen. Hist., vol. vii. p. 344.

Podargus? *gracilis*? Steph. Cont. of Shaw's Zool., vol. xiii. p. 93.

Podargus Australis? Ib., vol. xiii. p. 92.

Podargus cinereus? Cuv. Règn. Anim., pl. 4. fig. 1.—Vieill. Nouv. Dict. d'Hist. Nat., tom. xxvii. p. 151. pl. G. 37. fig. 3.—Vieill. Ency. Méth., p. 547.

Cold-River Goatsucker, Lath. Gen. Hist., vol. vii. p. 369.

Podargus Humeralis, Vig. and Horsf. in Linn. Trans., vol. xv. p. 198.—Jard. and Selb. Ill. Orn., vol. ii. pl. 88.—Swains. Class. of Birds, vol. ii. p. 338.

So great a similarity reigns throughout the *Podargi* inhabiting Australia, that it is most difficult to distinguish them; and after a minute examination of a great number of specimens it appears to me that there are five species, only two of which are inhabitants of New South Wales, and to these, in my opinion, the various names of the older authors are referrible. But as it must ever remain a matter of uncertainty as to which these names have been applied, I have preferred to retain for the present bird that proposed by Messrs. Vigors and Horsfield.

The Tawny-shouldered Podargus may be distinguished by the greater breadth of its markings, by the decided admixture of tawny in its colouring, by the feathers of the head having a small round spot of white at the tip, and by the more boldly-marked tips of the coverts. It is plentifully dispersed over New South Wales, where it is not restricted to any peculiar character of country, but inhabits alike the thick brushes near the coast, the hilly districts, and the thinly-wooded plains of the interior. I found it breeding on the low swampy islands studding the mouth of the Hunter, and on the Apple-tree (*Angophora*) flats of Yarrundi, near the Liverpool Range. In their habits and mode of life the *Podargi* differ very considerably from the true Nightjars, and also in many particulars from *Ægotheles*.

Like the rest of the genus, the Tawny-shouldered Podargus is strictly nocturnal, sleeping throughout the day on the dead branch of a tree, in an upright position across, and never parallel to, the branch, and which it so nearly resembles as scarcely to be distinguishable from it. I have occasionally seen it beneath the thick foliage of the *Casuarinæ*, and I have been informed that it sometimes shelters itself in the hollow trunks of the *Eucalypti*, but I could never detect one in such a situation; I mostly found them in pairs, perched near each other on the branches of the gums, in situations not at all sheltered from the beams of the midday sun. So lethargic are its slumbers, that it is almost impossible to arouse it, and I have frequently shot one without disturbing its mate sitting close by; it may also be knocked off with sticks or stones, and sometimes is even taken with the hand: when aroused, it flies lazily off with heavy flapping wings to a neighbouring tree, and again resumes its slumbers until the approach of evening, when it becomes as animated and active as it had been previously dull and stupid. The food consists of insects of various kinds; but in what way they are obtained is uncertain, though the contents of the stomach of one I dissected induce me to believe that it does not usually capture its prey while on the wing, or subsist upon nocturnal insects alone, but that it is in the habit of creeping among the branches in search of such as are in a state of repose; and an examination of the tail will, I think, serve to strengthen this supposition, since it in some degree resembles the form and structure of that organ in many of the climbing birds. The power it possesses of shifting the position of the outer toe backwards, as circumstances may require, is a very singular feature, and may also tend to assist them in their progress among the branches. A bird I shot at Yarrundi, in the middle of the night, had the stomach filled with fresh-captured mantis and locusts (*Phasmidæ* and *Cicadæ*), which never move at night, and the latter of which are generally resting against the upright boles of the trees. In other specimens I found the remains of small *Coleoptera*, intermingled with the fibres of the roots of what appeared to be a parasitic plant, such as would be found in decayed and hollow trees. The whole contour of the bird shows that it is not formed for extensive flight or for performing those rapid evolutions that are necessary for the capture of its prey in the air, the wing being short and concave in comparison with those of the true aerial Nightjars, and particularly with the Australian form to which I have given the name of *Eurostopodus*.

Of its mode of nidification I can speak with confidence, having seen many pairs breeding during my rambles in the woods. It makes a slightly-constructed flat nest of sticks carelessly interwoven together, and placed at the fork of a horizontal branch of sufficient size to ensure its safety; the tree most frequently chosen is an *Eucalyptus*, but I have occasionally seen the nest on an Apple-tree (*Angophora*) or a Swamp-Oak (*Casuarina*). In every instance one of the birds was sitting on the eggs and the other perched